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Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of 47 members of the Human Rights Council

Note verbale dated 3 April 2006 from the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretariat

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretariat of the United Nations and has the honour to inform it that the United Kingdom is standing for election to the United Nations Human Rights Council at the election to be held during the sixtieth session of the General Assembly on 9 May 2006.

The United Kingdom is committed to striving for the highest standards of human rights around the world. It believes that the United Nations plays a unique and vital role in the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide and that the establishment of the new Human Rights Council is a key opportunity further to develop that role.

The United Kingdom has been an active and committed member of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and has been closely involved in human rights discussion across the board. The United Kingdom, through its foreign and development policies, seeks to provide practical support in the promotion of the full range of human rights: economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights. If elected to the Human Rights Council, the United Kingdom will continue to strive for enhanced promotion and protection of human rights, and for further cooperation on human rights among all Member States of the United Nations and across the United Nations system.

The United Kingdom will shortly submit a specific set of pledges and commitments to underscore its own continuing commitment to human rights and how it will contribute to the work of the Council if elected.

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Annex to the note verbale dated 3 April 2006 from the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretariat

Voluntary pledges and commitments of the United Kingdom on the Human Rights Council

1) Commitment to work in partnership to make the Council a success

The UK will participate actively in the work of the Council, in a spirit of openness, cooperation and dialogue with all partners; will promote the Council as a forum for dialogue on thematic issues on all human rights, and will work to broaden understanding among civilisations, cultures and religions.

The UK will actively consult across the UN membership on the Council's decisions and seek to support states' efforts to implement the Council's recommendations.

The UK will continue to work closely with regional organisations, national human rights institutions and civil society, to support and advance their contributions to the work of the new Council, and will seek their views in advance of major UN human rights meetings.

The UK will contribute actively to reaching agreement on the creation of an effective universal periodic review mechanism for the Human Rights Council.

2) Commitment to support UN bodies

The UK will maintain its institutional support to the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) over the next three years including through over £2.5 million annually in un-earmarked funds, giving OHCHR full independence to decide how to use those funds to meet their mandate.

The UK will maintain its standing invitation to all Special Procedures to visit the UK, and will continue to cooperate fully with them. The UK will work to maintain its record of submitting full and timely reports to Treaty Monitoring Bodies.

The UK plans to contribute over £400 million over the next two years (2006-2008) in institutional support to UN bodies, including those that have a key role in protection and promotion of human rights, for example the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Democracy Fund and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

3) Commitment to advance human rights internationally

The UK will continue to encourage governments around the world to ratify the UN human rights treaties and, through its development and other assistance programmes, to help them abide by the obligations that those treaties place on states.

The UK will continue to support country-led development strategies, and to work with partners to integrate human rights principles of participation, inclusion and accountability into development. The UK will continue to provide technical and financial assistance to states to build the capacity of their security and justice systems, with over £225 million currently committed to security and justice sector programmes in developing countries.

The UK will continue to be at the forefront of new approaches to human rights issues, such as:

as the third country to have ratified the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture, the UK is already preparing to establish its National Preventative Mechanism before the Protocol comes into force. The UK stands ready to share its experience of creating a national preventative mechanism with other states working towards the same goal.

the UK will continue to take a lead in international efforts to advance the issue of corporate responsibility and human rights in consultation with all stakeholders, consistent with our role in leading UN negotiations to establish a Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and through initiatives such as the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights.

the UK will continue to support international processes to advance gender equality, including implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The UK will support the UN to strengthen its ability to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. We remain committed to the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and will take this forward through our National Action Plan.

The UK will continue to support the negotiations for a new UN Convention on disability rights, including the active involvement of civil society in the process.

The UK will maintain its efforts to counter the devastating effects of HIV-AIDS in many parts of the world, and to improve the promotion and protection of the rights of those affected. The UK's strategy for accelerated action on HIV-AIDS promises increased resources of £1.5 billion over three years from 2005-2007.

The UK recognises that development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The UK will maintain its aim to eliminate poverty in developing countries, in particular through achievement by 2015 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UK's support for the achievement of the MDGs can contribute to the realisation of human rights, such as the achievement of universal primary education (MDG 2), the promotion of gender equality (MDG 3), and the reduction of child mortality (MDG 4). We will continue to tackle exclusion and discrimination through our development programmes, and promote equal rights for all.

4) Commitment to uphold human rights standards at home

The UK will continue to strive for the highest standards in promotion and protection of human rights. To this end, it will work to maintain full implementation of its international obligations under the UN Covenants, Conventions and Optional Protocols to which it is party.

The UK will continue to aim to improve the promotion and protection of the human rights of all its citizens. This will include through initiatives such as the

Discrimination Law Review, which is currently reviewing all aspects of domestic discrimination and equality legislation with the aim of consolidating it into a single comprehensive Equality Act before 2009. We will continue to implement National Strategies to increase race equality and community cohesion in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in accordance with commitments undertaken at the 2001 Durban World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

The UK will continue to aim for the constant improvement of mechanisms and procedures to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all its citizens. As part of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was formally established in March 1999. A new National Human Rights Institution for Great Britain is also being established in the form of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights. This Commission will be based on three core pillars – equality, human rights and good relations, working towards fairness throughout our society by removing unfair barriers and extending opportunities to all. Similarly, legislation has been introduced to the Scottish Parliament to create a new human rights body for Scotland.

The UK will continue to protect the rights of disabled people. We have already extended our extensive Disability Discrimination legislation and we have a clear aim that by 2025, disabled people should have the full opportunities and choices necessary to improve their quality of life. We are focusing our strategy on promoting independent living – giving disabled people choice, empowerment and freedom. To make this a reality, in December 2005 we established an Office for Disability Issues which will develop and drive a cross government strategy to deliver equality for disabled people. We will work closer with disabled people and their organisations and ensure that they have a voice at the heart of policy- and decision-making by setting up a National Forum to engage directly with government, and we will pilot and promote new ways of improving service delivery to disabled people to support their independence and choice.

The UK will continue to foster a culture of transparency, openness and dialogue in its pursuit of improved human rights standards. The UK Government will continue to invite the contribution of NGOs, and will maintain dialogue on its human rights work, including with Parliament and civil society.